In 1905 Gokhale was at the zenith of his political life, which began in 1899 when he was elected to the Bombay Provincial Legislative Council. For two years he could develop his parliamentary skills in the Provincial Council. By that time Pherozeshah Mehta had decided to give up his seat on the Central Legislative Council. Gokhale wrote him a letter on January 15, 1901 appealing him to consider him as a possible candidate. This letter was, as Srinivas Sastri had described, full of eloquent words, charged with emotion and at the same time conveying to Sir Pherozeshah the feeling of reverence.

In the letter, Gokhale conveyed at the outset, that he was about to retire from the Fergusson College and dedicate the rest of his life in the service of the country. He wanted to go by the path, which Dadabhai had chosen himself. He then wrote that he had heard that Pherozeshah was to retire from the Supreme Council. Gokhale told Pherozeshah that he should continue to represent Bombay presidency as long as his health and energy vouchsafe. But if what he heard was true, then Gokhale wanted Pherozeshah to consider his candidature sympathetically. Gokhale writes, “Everyone feels I state what I honestly think— that on the score of gifts, natural and acquired, on the score of prestige, on the score of those numerous qualities which are indispensable in a political leader, there is no equalling you or even coming near you. The same cannot be said, of course, of the men who aspire to succeed you, and there being little difference between the qualifications of the various
candidates, I ask for your sympathy and encouragement. In 1897, when perfect storm of fierce criticism broke over my head in connection with my unhappy share in the incidents of that year, nothing wounded me deeper than Bhownaggree’s denunciation of me in the House of Commons as a ‘despicable perjurer’. The words burnt into my heart, and the night I read them, I made up my mind to devote my life, as soon as I was free from my pledge, to the furtherance of our political cause in England, to which I had, without meaning it, done such a serious injury. And for this work a brief period of membership of the Vice regal Council will be useful. I have written frankly and without reserve, and hope I shall not be misunderstood. I already owe much to you in public life, and I feel I may lay bare to you the aspiration as well as the wounds of my heart without being repulsed for doing so”.

1

Pherozeshah readily accepted Gokhale’s plea and told him that he would fully support his candidature for the membership of the Central Legislative Council. After Gokhale’s election Pherozeshah wrote to Sir Bipin Krishna Bose, who was a high official in the Judicial Department and later became a judge of the High Court at Nagpur, that in Gokhale, “We would have a colleague who would soon make a mark in the public life of the country”. Though Pherozeshah had resigned his membership of the Council for reasons of health, Sir Bipin was not convinced that it was the real reason. He thought Pherozeshah resigned to open for Gokhale a wider field of service to India.

2
Unfortunately, the day after Gokhale wrote to Pherozeshah, his master, Justice Ranade, died after a few days of illness. Gokhale had great devotion for Ranade and he regarded him not only as a guide and a philosopher but also as his father. He was impressed by high intelligence, patriotism, liberalism and moral personality of Ranade. Gokhale felt like an orphan by the death of Ranade. His letter to Dadabhai and later his speeches show how deeply he felt the loss of his mentor.

Gokhale then decided to commemorate the memory of Ranade by having memorials in Poona and Madras. He involved many people in this endeavour and made several speeches to collect funds. His efforts bore fruit and suitable memorials were erected accordingly.

After his election to the Central Legislative Council was announced, Gokhale resigned as a professor at the Fergusson College. His farewell speech is memorable for his honesty, sincerity and dedication. For some years this speech was memorised by hundreds of educated people, at least in Maharashtra. Explaining the most important reason which influenced his decision to retire, Gokhale told his colleagues and students in a meeting on September 19, 1902, “Years ago I remember to have read the story of a man, who lived by the side of the sea, who had a nice cottage and fields that yielded him their abundance, and who was surrounded by a loving family. But to him the sea had a strange fascination. When it lay gently, heaving like
an infant asleep, it appealed to him; when it raged like an angry and roaring lion, it still appealed to him; till at last he could withstand the fatal fascination no longer. And so he disposed of everything and putting his all into a boat, he launched it on the bosom of the sea. Twice was he beaten back by the waves—a warning he would not heed. He made a third attempt when the pitiless sea overwhelmed him. To a certain extent this seems to me to be my position today”. Gokhale thus launched his boat on an uncharted sea. He faced several storms and had to strive hard to take the boat to the safe harbour. There were periods of exultation and also of depression. But Gokhale did not falter in his resolve and never wavered from his goal.

Two years before Gokhale took his seat in the Central Legislature, Lord Curzon had taken over as the viceroy and the governor-general of India. Curzon was no stranger to India. He had visited it earlier on his tour of South Asia and aspired to be the viceroy of India. He also was aware of the problems of the country, as he had served for some time as the deputy secretary of state for India. He had firm convictions and never budged from them, though in politics for a long time, he did not believe in flexibility. Curzon believed that the British Empire in India was divinely ordained and the British were to hold that in trust. He regarded himself as a trustee and exerted without regard to his health. Efficiency and duty were his watchwords. He wanted everybody, who served in the administration, never
to be slack or waver from duty. So when he found that some of the soldiers were involved in the atrocities in Burma, he sent the whole company to Eden as punishment. This infuriated the Englishmen, who thought the punishment excessive; but the Indians were elated. Curzon did not mind the criticism of his countrymen, as he never cared for popularity. Curzon believed that as rulers, the English must be above board and establish themselves as morally superior. This alone, he thought, would enable them to be acceptable to the Indians. He also believed that England and India had been united by the almighty God.

In another speech Curzon assured that in India he would combine duty with sympathy. He also said that those who had visited Eastern countries had known that it was a different sort of a university where education was continuous. No degree was conferred. It was like a temple where you learn something and forget something. However, Curzon had not forgotten anything, and displayed sympathy on very few occasions. His ambition was limitless which was also accompanied by egoism, which led a political commentator to state that Lord Curzon -would have been great, if he could have occasionally forgotten that he was Lord Curzon.

After assuming the reins of office, Curzon spent about three months in reading the files of all departments and came to know how his predecessors dealt with numerous problems. After his study of the files was completed,
Curzon wrote to the secretary of state that the Government of India was caught in the vortex of files and papers. In a given file, detailed notings were made right from a clerk to the highest officer, which ultimately resulted in a large file. In the process, there remained much less time to read the documents and take decision. Curzon thought that the pen was more oppressive than the bureaucracy. He decided to give priority to fortify the frontiers of India. Like some of his countrymen he was convinced that Russia had aggressive designs against Afghanistan and would occupy it any time. Lord Salisbury had said that if Curzon’s arguments were to be accepted, then an army of fifty thousand had to be deployed, which was not possible. However, Curzon’s first move was to remove the troops from the more dangerous areas and station them in secure positions. He told the tribals in the frontier region that they should defend themselves, and the British army would support them from the rear. This reduced the expenditure on the army. But his Afghanistan policy and his plan for the occupation of Chitral generated much debate and criticism in the British Parliament.

Curzon had realised that the Bombay and Madras governors were enjoying much power than any other governors. After the assassination of Rand and Ayerst in Poona, many were arrested and Natu brothers were detained without trial, which invited much debate in the Parliament. To Curzon’s query about the detention of the Natu brothers, Governor Sandhurst
gave some casual replies. However, later both brothers had to be released. Even six months after the arrival of Curzon, the governor of Madras did not send him any letter, and refused to take any notice of him. Taking affront, Curzon wrote to the secretary of state demanding the curtailment of the powers of governors of Bombay and Madras. This proposal was accepted, and then Curzon sent a communication to that effect to both governors and gave publicity to his communication. The administration of Madras Presidency in general, and the police department in particular, was rife with corruption. “The rules of service in the ICS notwithstanding, a Chief Secretary was found taking bribes to provide for his forthcoming retirement. The First Member of the Governors Executive Council was caught in a lie to the Secretary of State and in land speculation. 35 civilians, including the whole of the Board of Revenue and half of the Governors Executive Council, were discovered speculating in plantation and gold shares in the native states; two leading officials, D. Carmichael and W. Huddleston, were accused publicly of nepotism; a Collector was dismissed for bribery”. These and other details are given by D.A. Washbrook after examining the Madras government records. He has also described how the collector of Madura became law unto himself and indulged in nepotism and all sorts of malpractices. But the Madras administration being very lethargic, the collector escaped any punishment. Both the viceroy and the secretary of state were amazed to see that the Madras administration, instead of punishing these
officials, was protecting them. As Curzon insisted on duty, he advised the Talukdars to behave as the trustees and not as autocrats. In a circular to the chiefs of states, he told them not to visit Europe often, and commended the practice of the Maharaja of Gwalior of touring the various parts of the state and understanding the problems of the people. Addressing a gathering of the students of the Rajkumar College, Curzon advised them not to aspire to become Europeans. Such activities and utterances of Curzon took everybody by surprise.

Curzon was put to test in 1899 when Gujarat, Central and United Provinces were affected by famine. The severity of this famine was felt more, as there had been another famine two years earlier. Curzon, then, came down from Simla and toured Rajasthan, Gujarat and Central Provinces in the smoldering October heat. While visiting the famine areas, he found that the government of Bombay was very tardy in providing relief to the affected people. He then admonished it and put the matters straight. By 1900 three and half million people were on the famine works and by July the number rose to six and half million. Never were so many employed on famine works. Thousands of cattle died of the scarcity of fodder. The tribals living in forests started crowding in the cities and towns. Water scarcity brought in cholera. Speaking on the budget in 1901, Lord Curzon gave the details of the ravages of famine. He said that an area of almost four hundred thousand sq. miles was
famine-stricken. Loss was to the tune of rupees seventy five crores. Gujrat, Berar, Hissar and Chattisgarh (present day Madhya Pradesh) lost the entire crop, while in other parts some crop could be saved. Curzon estimated that one fourth of the Indian population was affected by famine. The government spent rupees ten million on relief directly; while land-owners and cultivators received aid to the tune of rupees thirty eight lak. He said that half of the land revenue from the Bombay and Central provinces would be lost. Punjab used to contribute rupees four million as revenue, which also had to be given up. Lord Curzon appealed for generous donations from the public who responded readily. But the sordid side also came to light, when B.G. Khaparde, a friend of Lokmanya Tilak, visited London in 1909 and met Wilfrid Blunt who had large number of friends in the political circles. Khaparde told Blunt how the accounts were manipulated on the provincial level in famine years. Khaparde said, “In Berar, no accounts were kept by those entrusted with the distribution of relief, the money wanted being drawn from a fund at Hyderabad, which consisted of the surpluses of six or seven years paid from the Berar and kept there in hand, but when the famine was over, those who had administered the relief were called together and were told to write out the accounts; so much for one thing, so much for another, so as to make up the sum taken from the Fund; thus there was no real check at all upon the expenditure”.⁴

Lord Curzon did not accept the criticism that excessive land revenue
was responsible for the poverty of India. However, some officials who served in the revenue and other departments, in a memorial to the secretary of state on January 20, 1900, controverted the viceroy’s contention. They said that irrigation was helpful to the cultivators but most parts were dependent on the rainfall, as irrigation was confined to limited areas. The officers then wrote, “We consider it essential that the share taken as the Government demand on the land should be strictly limited in every Province. Where the Land Revenue is paid directly by the cultivators, as in most parts of Madras and Bombay, the Government demand should be limited; to 50% of the net profit after a liberal deduction for cultivation expenses has been made, and should not ordinarily exceed one-fifth of the gross produce. No revision of the Land Tax of any Province or any part thereof should be made within thirty years of the expiration of any former revision. A limit be fixed in each Province beyond which it may not be permissible to surcharge the Land Tax with local cesses. We are of opinion that Bengal rate of six and one forth per cent is a fair one and that in no case should the rate exceed 10 per cent”.5

The other measures that Curzon adopted were of far-reaching consequence. He asked his Advisory Council to pass a resolution stating the policy to be implemented in the time of famine and drought. He found that there was no uniformity in different provinces with regard to the suspension of revenue and also the relief works. The resolution brought all the provinces
on the same level and did not give any discretionary or special powers to any province. But the long term measure that Curzon adopted was to start an Agriculture Department which established a research centre at Pusa and agricultural training schools and colleges at many places. To improve irrigation facilities, Curzon appointed an Irrigation Commission. He also established a Forest Department. To provide credit to the cultivators, he brought out an act under which cooperative credit societies were to function. Madras took a lead in establishing these societies. Curzon also established a Railway Board, which was helpful in making the railways profitable. The British government stood for free market and so it did not believe in the government intervention in the economic matters. But Curzon, with all these measures, reversed the policy. The other measures he adopted were to appoint Police Commission to improve the police administration and an Archaeological Department to preserve and develop the ancient and historical monuments.

When famine was raging in many parts of India. Vaughan Nash, a representative of the ‘Manchester Guardian was on a tour of the country and his newsletters were published by his paper and later in a book titled *The Great Famine*. His newsletters gave the other side of the picture presented by the government. He wrote that because of the reduced demand due to famine, many of the cotton mills in Bombay were closed. Bombay was also crowded
by the famine-stricken people whom police tried in the initial period to oust, but ultimately they gave up, as they found that the exodus could not be stopped. Other parts of the Bombay Province also saw an influx of people. From Hyderabad alone ten thousand came in one week. Government had issued instructions under the Famine Code, but most of those orders remained only on the paper. Those who were working on the relief-work were not getting prescribed wages. And those who were unable to work were getting limited relief. Officials were keen to deduct from wages and relief under one pretext or the other. But by and large, officials worked very hard and did help people. The main work was that of stone-breaking, and at various places rubble was piled up in huge quantities. Some small and medium irrigation works were undertaken and many others were only on paper. Besides, some of them were left uncompleted. About nine hundred million famine-stricken people were spread over Bombay, Central province, some princely states and the Punjab. Because of the shortage of fodder, hundreds of thousands of cattle perished. Thousands of people left their children and went in search of work and food. There was nobody to cremate the dead bodies, which were left on the streets unattended. Bombay government did not remit the land revenue, which added to the misery of the people. Central province and Punjab were much liberal than Bombay. A district in Bombay province, which had been free from the Banias, came under their clutches. Banias made large profits, as they charged heavy interest and also acquired land by way of mortgage.
Several Indian leaders appreciated various measures adopted and innovations made by Lord Curzon, and they publicly praised him. In the annual session of the Congress in 1901 in Calcutta, Wacha, in his presidential address, complimented Curzon for undertaking various schemes beneficial to the people and suggested that his term should be extended. Gokhale in his maiden speech in the Central Legislative Council expressed confidence that Curzon in the near future would occupy higher positions and help the people of India. But it was not all milk and honey, as Curzon brought in a bill to amend the University Act, which aimed at reducing the members of the Senate, which infuriated the educated Indians. His bill amending the Municipal Act also aimed at reducing the number of the elected representatives and curtailing their rights. After calling a meeting of only the officials, Curzon appointed an Education Commission comprising of all government officials with an exception of Syed Hussain Bilgamy, who was in the service of the Nizam. When this Commission came under much criticism, the name of Justice Gurudas Banerjea of the Calcutta High Court was added. The Commission thought that in order to improve the working of the University and also the quality of education, the membership of the Senate should be reduced. In Allahabad it was 82, Lahore 104, Calcutta 180, Madras 197 and Bombay 310. The Commission also recommended the increase in the fees of colleges and more restrictive conditions for affiliation. Before the Bill was passed, Curzon had prohibited any new additions to the Senate of the
Calcutta University. He made it clear that the main task of the university was to impart high quality education and thus prepare the students, to qualify them to face the future. After a lapse of a century one can take an objective view of the measure to reduce the number of the Senate members. It was not objectionable then and neither it is now. Of course, Curzon did this not only to improve the educational standards, but to spite the educated Indians for whom he had contempt. That was the crux of the matter; and so opposition to the Education Bill gathered strength. When the Bill was introduced, Pherozeshah Mehta was the member of the Central Legislative Council and Gokhale was that of the Bombay Legislative Council. Pherozeshah succeeded in forming a committee in Calcutta on which some Europeans agreed to serve. There were some meetings of the citizens of Calcutta where some Bengalis made highly critical speeches, which Gokhale did not like. He felt that some of the members of the committee would not stay together because of the criticism. But he also thought that Pherozeshah would prevail upon them to stay united.

Gokhale in a letter to Pherozeshah congratulated him on forming a committee to oppose the Education Bill. Gokhale wrote, “That you should have got the European members of the committee to join in all your criticisms proposals except one, is a remarkable triumph for us all; and everybody must recognize that it has been achieved mainly owing to your great tact and
influence and your powerful personality. It is felt here that, if the Bombay Senate adopts this report, as most probably now be the case, the opposition to the Commission’s recommendations will be enormously strengthened. They have no hope here of getting their own Senate to condemn the Report as ours has done, or rather will shortly do, and the difference in calibre and political grit between their leaders and ours is, therefore, at present being freely recognised here. You know how emotional these people are, and how easily swayed. The very men who, after the Congress of 1901 were violent in their denunciation of your and Mr. Banerjee’s high-handedness in extinguishing Nundy’s Congress Committee, are now praising you to the skies and recognizing in you—very justly—the greatest political leader of our time”.

While Curzon was moving fast, what was the state of affairs of the Congress? It met three days in a year and passed almost same resolutions. In 1899, compared with the speed with which Lord Curzon was acting, the inactivity of the Congress was conspicuous. In Maharashtra, the imprisonment of Lokmanya Tilak and apology by Gokhale paralysed the political life for two years. After his release Tilak wrote in ‘Kesari’ on July 4, 1889 that “in the days of plague, government became hauteur which paralysed the social life of Poona. Now everybody should strive hard to activate the institutions. But this could only be done by putting an end to the divisions among the leaders and in the institutions. Reformers of different hue
and those, who were opposed to them, had their own quarrels, and the moderates and radicals were also equally divided; but the government trashed them all. We might think anything of ourselves, but the government was there to put down all of us. Poona suffered for the last two years because of the factions in the society”. It was not that Poona alone was divided; Bengal and other provinces did not fare better. Congress leaders had become lukewarm about the organisation. Wacha conveyed this to Dadabhai in a letter on February 14, 1901.

He said, “My position has grown very awkward, and I really wish I may be relieved of a duty which is so difficult to discharge amidst conflicting bodies. A section of the Bengal element, a greater portion of Luck now and Allahabad, and almost all from Madras are rabid. Your big leaders nowadays don’t care to attend the Congress. So we have a minor crew—most of whom try to boss themselves without judgment and wisdom. And you know in a body where cliquism is prevalent to a large degree, it is impossible to make a head. In short, I am disgusted with many of them and were I to relate all I know of the Congress in public, I would certainly damn it forever. The leaders are much at fault. I cannot excuse their studied absence at Congress time and their perfect indifference to its cause all the year round. This is not the way to carry on the Congress organisation. We cannot afford to lose these leaders for that would be even a worse calamity and the Congress would drift
goodness knows where”. In another letter on February 28, 1903 Wacha wrote to Dadabhai. “There was the captious Punjab which has been fretting and fuming and fanning flames of sullen discontent. They are screaming aloud yet, that the whole Punjab is disaffected! Why? It is simply the cry of wolf”. The Punjab has never been in my opinion a source of strength, politically or financially, to the Congress”.8

In fact, this was the case of lady protesting too much. The person to be blamed for the Congress’ malice was Pherozeshah Mehta. He did not want to abide by the rules adopted by the Congress, as he wanted to keep the Congress organisation under his thumb. Even in his absence, he saw to it that the election’ of the Congress president and resolutions to be adopted must have his approval. Wacha at times might have been exasperated by Pherozeshah’s attitude, but he always stood by him. The Congress constitution was adopted in 1898 and Chandawarkar was nominated as president because Pherozeshah backed him. His election was not according to the provisions of the constitution. The constitution also created three tiers sub-committees. The All India Congress Committee was to be the highest committee. The constitution put restrictions on Bombay and Bengal Congress Committees, which for long had enjoyed the monopoly of power. Leaders of Punjab along with some others were insistent on adoption of the constitution and that was why Wacha was complaining against them. N.N. Ghose, writing
an editorial note in the September-October 1902 issue of Kayastha Samachar’, a prestigious monthly from Allahabad, edited by Dr. Sacchidanand Sinha, criticised the attitude of some Congress leaders. He said that “a committee was appointed in 1899 to draft a constitution for the Congress, but Bengal was opposed to it. Only one representative from Bengal attended a meeting of the Committee held in October 1900. At the Allahabad meeting in October 1901, Bengali was conspicuous by its absence. Now in 1902, successful efforts were made to disband the committee altogether. This was the victory for Bengal.” Surendranath, Mudholkar, Khaparde in a statement blamed the committee for not doing the assigned job. But Ghose pointed out that it was not given sufficient time. He said that “an impression had been created that the committee was disbanded under pressure and if the matters would stand as they were, then the educated Indians would be angry with the Congress”. John McLane was correct when he wrote in 1903, “The Congress had little to show for its existence in 1903, nineteen years after it was founded. It had no money, no permanent organization, no sustained activity. It had failed to find any significant support among the masses and the Muslims. It was a house divided, with little confidence in itself and enjoying the confidence of few others. It was ignored or ridiculed by British officials. It received moralistic and condescending lectures on its shortcomings from its British friends. Yet in its own torpor and demoralization lay the seeds of revival”.

9
Earlier, Malabari had warned in his January 14, 1901 issue of ‘Spectator’ that a handful of leaders did not represent the mass of Congressmen. The majority of the Congressmen wanted the organisation to take a radical posture. This majority might one day take the moral leadership, which was unavoidable. Wacha was complaining to Dadabhai on behalf of this handful of leaders who were coming under criticism in the Congress sessions. In 1900 in the Lahore session, many delegates from Punjab and some other provinces complained that they were not getting adequate representation on the All India Congress Committee, and succeeded in getting it increased. But, when the session was held in Calcutta, in 1901, Bombay and Calcutta leaders jointly saw that the new AICC was not appointed. This infuriated the Punjab delegates, who warned that if the new constitution wasn’t implemented, they would boycott the session. As the next session was held in Ahmadabad, which was the sphere of influence of Mehta, no opposition to him was possible. Wacha, without consulting any provincial Congress Committee, saw to it that Chandawarkar was nominated as president. At Madras, where the session was held in 1903, President Lai Mohan Ghose, without naming Pherozeshah Mehta, criticised him. Ghose said that the Congress demand was to bring in representative government and so the Congress should not be under the thumb of few leaders. Pherozeshah by his rejoinder hurt the feelings of many delegates. This session was poorly attended. ‘The Hindu’ as well as ‘The Indian Nation’ of Calcutta made critical
comments against the method of nomination of the president of the Congress by few, and warned that that would spell ruin of the organization. As the feelings of the delegates were hurt by Mehta, Gokhale visited the city to assuage the feelings of the Madras leaders. Gokhale cited the example of the Japanese, who he said, obediently followed their leaders. Gokhale’s intention was honourable, as he did not want any rift in the Congress, but his argument was faulty and misleading. The seeds of a split in the Congress were laid in Madras and even earlier in the Calcutta session. Pherozeshah, Surendranath Banerjea and some of their associates like Wacha had started behaving as if the Congress was their personal property. They feared that if they lost the control of the Congress, it would be radicalised and also communalised. Gokhale, however, did not want to control the organization, as he was not power-hungry; but as he did not want Congress to be dominated by the radicals and communal elements, he was supporting Mehta and other moderates.

Dadabhai, on the other hand, was adopting radical views. That was why when the British people contributed to the fund for the famine-stricken people in India, Dadabhai impressed upon them that it was the duty of the British government to donate considerably large sum. By the end of the century Dadabhai thought it was advisable to convince the English working class that India was being exploited by the British ruling elite. He, therefore,
addressed several meetings of the workers, telling them that it was in their
interest to raise the standard of the Indian people, so that they would buy
more English goods. After seeing a report of one of his speeches, ‘Amrit
Bazar Patrika’ wrote that such utterances in India would be a cause for a case
under the sedition law. Dadabhai was also alarmed by the increasing
controversy in Congress and feared that if unchecked, it would split. So he
wrote to Lokmanya Tilak not to precipitate the matter. Tilak in his reply on
December 6, 1904, assured Dadabhai that he was not opposed to the
constitutional agitation. At the same time he asserted that Congress must
increase its efforts and go to the logical conclusion. Tilak said, “I have never
been, nor am I in any way against the Congress. Constitutional agitation, I
shall be the last person to decry. But I am rather sanguine by temperament,
and think that we must push our efforts to their logical extreme. I firmly
believe—and let me tell you that you yourself have been the principal cause
of this belief—that if we wish to get any rights or privileges, we must agitate
in England in a missionary spirit. The Anglo-Indians here will not listen to
what we say. The pressure must come from England and this is possible only
if we follow your example, establish a permanent political mission in England
and work there persistently after the fashion of Christian missionaries in India
or elsewhere. What a grand thing it would be, I said, if Sir P.M. Mehta, Mr.
Surendranath Banerjea or Rai Bahadur Ananda Charlu were to go to England
and stay there for some years agitating the Indian questions like your noble
self? But I am sorry to say that there is no prospect of these great men taking up the agitation in right earnest and pushing it home. My scheme is that either the elder leaders of the Congress should themselves follow your example and spend the last few years of their lives in agitating Indian questions in England, or failing this, we should select half a dozen younger men and maintain them in England for ten years at least, by paying them their expenses”.

At the time of the third session of the Congress, in 1887, Bipin Chandra Pal was working with ‘The Tribune’ in Lahore. He decided to attend the session. He was aware that many delegates disapproved of the way in which the whole programme of the session was worked out. Pal writes, “I was not as yet known to Mr. Hume, but Mr. Namjoshi was. So it was decided that immediately upon our arrival in Madras, Mr. Namjoshi would go and see Mr. Hume and place this proposal (to decide upon the programme in the open session) before him. This was done, but did not receive the serious attention of the General Secretary. The evening before the public session, the leaders had a meeting in Mr. Hume’s bungalow, and the programme was settled there, as noted. When the Bengal leaders came back, we asked them what was to be the programme of the next day. One of them, I think, Surendranath Banerjea, said that the programme had been settled. This was the signal for a combined attack on them. ‘Who settled them’, we asked. ‘We did’ was the reply. ‘But
who are these “we”, we asked”. One of them replied, ‘Mr. W.C. Bonnerjee, Mr. Guruprasad Sen, Mr. Narendra Nath Sen, Dr. Trailokya Nath Mitra, Mr. Surendranath Banerjea and others from Bengal’. ‘But what was their authority”? This question staggered our friends”. Pal then said that Surendranath Banerjea assured that the programme would be finalised only after their approval. But next day there was no such move. Instead, the delegates received copies of the resolution. At this, Pal got agitated and went to Namjoshi’s place where other delegates from Bombay were housed. Pal told Namjoshi that he would not tolerate what was happening, and warned that after the presidential address he would move a resolution and challenge the circulated notice. Justice Ranade happened to be there and listened to what Pal had to say. He complained against the behaviour of Hume and the manner in which resolutions were accepted for consideration by the open session. Ranade, then admitted that wrong was indeed done. But he advised not to express the grievances openly and asked what was the alternative. Pal suggested that after his address the president should announce to form a representative committee, which would go through the resolutions and make recommendations. Ranade acted as a conciliator and the compromise was accepted to the satisfaction of all, according to Pal. 11

As the Congress had been drifting some years past, Hume, Dadabhai and Wedderburn, in 1899, had sent a circular to the Congressmen in India
noting the achievements of the organization but it had no effect. They also reminded them to arrange to pay the amount pledged by the Congress to the British Committee and its periodical. This appeal also failed to evoke any response.

Gokhale took his seat in the Central Legislative Council, when Lord Curzon was enjoying popularity among most of the educated Indians. When Curzon visited Bombay, the municipality presented him with an address. In reply to this, Lord Curzon said that as in other countries, it would be helpful, if the rulers in India received support of the popular opinion. If the administration came under criticism, it should not be construed that the critic was always wrong. He might be in the right, at least there would not be any harm in making inquiry. It was easy to denounce the criticism in a country of a continental proportion like India. Native opinion could be characterised as that of some groups like educated class, business community etc. Curzon then appealed for the cooperation of all citizens. But Curzon himself did not live up to the sentiments he expressed publicly. His behaviour was that of an autocrat. He regarded himself as a very superior person’ and had contempt for the educated Indians whose opinions he started increasingly to discard. This attitude of the viceroy gave scope to Gokhale to ventilate the feelings of the educated Indians in the Central Legislative Council. A bill based on the Report of the Education Commission was moved in the Council in November
1903. Participating in the debate, Gokhale referred to Curzon’s remarks in the course of his speech on the budget of the previous year, that the educated Indians had unnecessary grudge against the government. Gokhale told the viceroy that if that was the case, then it called for the introspection on the part of the government.

Gokhale then discussed the University Bill thoroughly. He began by asking whether the conference in Simla, called by the viceroy, was of officials, as only one non-official European educationist was present. Gokhale also asked whether it was of the European educationists. Gokhale said that the official view, that the Universities had created discontented BAs and an army of the failed candidates, was wrong. These people were not a curse. They proved that the supply was more than the demand. Gokhale then said, “The truth is that this so-called discontent is no more than a natural feeling of dissatisfaction with things as they are, when you have on one side a large and steadily growing educated class of the children of the soil, and on the other a close and jealously-guarded monopoly of political power and high administrative office”. Gokhale reminded the government that the graduates coming from the English Universities are more dissatisfied than those from the Indian ones. He advised the government to adopt a friendly tone and absorb more and more Indian graduates in the administration. Gokhale said that the bill would not improve the quality of education. He characterized it as
more on the French model than the English. There was no provision to give equal representation in the University to the government, people and those whose children were enrolled in the University. The bill was sent to the Select Committee, but no radical changes were made. Gokhale criticized the curtailment of the rights of the Senate and the number of the members of that body. He also told that it was not the way to improve the standard of education. To achieve that objective, government should spend more on education and increase the grants and facilities to the colleges. After passing of the third reading of the bill, Gokhale confessed that the critics of the bill were defeated and whatever education was given in half a century had been laid waste. Though some of the provisions of the bill were baneful, there was nothing in it to reject it totally.

Srinivas Sastri, speaking on the life and times of Pherozeshah Mehta, did not endorse such rejection by both Pherozeshah and Gokhale. He said, “I should like to mention that the University Act was not as baneful a measure as Pherozeshah and Gokhale and others made it out to be. Upon the whole, subsequent events have shown, that while excessive enthusiasm was displayed by Government in bringing the University Act into effect, a good deal of benefit did follow it; and it was, from the point of efficiency and concentration of effort, a measure in advance. But from the point of view of popular element showing itself in educational matters, it was certainly a little
After the enactment, various appointments were made for different faculties, and some other measures were taken by the Chancellors. Some of these measures might have been declared illegal by the courts. So the government brought a bill which made all such measures legal and outside the purview of the courts. Gokhale strongly objected to this bill. He said if the measures taken by the chancellors were illegal, then the best course was to withdraw them.

On December 1903 a Bill to amend the Indian Official Secrets Act was moved, which the ‘Englishman’, a pro-government daily, said, if passed, would bring in the Russian model of administration. It naturally came under scathing criticism by Gokhale. He pointed out that the Bill proposed to place civil matters on a level with Naval and Military matters. It had not put English and Indian editors on the same footing. Gokhale said, “I would like to see the official who would venture to arrest and March to the police thana the editor of an Anglo-Indian paper. But so far as Indian editors are concerned, there are, I fear, officers in this country, who would not be sorry for an opportunity to march whole battalion of them to the police thana. The responsibility of the Government to the people in this country is merely moral; it is not legal, as in the West. The criticism by the Indian Press is the only outward check operating continuously upon the conduct of the bureaucracy, possessing absolute and uncontrolled power. The proper and
only remedy, worthy of the British Government, for whatever is really deplorable in the present state of things, is not to gag newspapers as proposed in this Bill, but discourage the issue of confidential circulars which seek to take away in the dark what has been promised again and again in Acts of Parliament, the Proclamations of Sovereigns, and the responsible utterances of the successive Viceroy. Of course with our Legislative Councils, as they are constituted at present, the Government has the power to pass any law as it pleases. But never before, I think, did the Government disassociate itself so completely from all public opinion—including Anglo-Indian public opinion—as it has done on the present occasion”. R.C. Dutt was very much pleased with Gokhale’s speeches on the University Bill and the Bill to amend the Official Secrets Act. Dutt wrote to Gokhale on March 22, 1904, “You have performed a noble and patriotic duty, both with the Official Secrets Bill and the University Bill and a grateful country will not forget your services. You have lost all along the line, as you yourself put it, but there are defeats which are more brilliant and more honourable than victories—and the fight that you have made during the last and worst years of a heartless and ungenerous Imperialism will be historic and will never be forgotten by our countrymen. I have myself fought this battle in another sphere for the last seven years of a blatant Imperialism, and I have failed in every single endeavour that I have made. But I have ever felt, and I feel it today that every blow which you and I have struck will have its effect and I have more hopes from the increasing
efforts and persistence of our countrymen rallying around us than I have fears from repressive acts of despots”.  

In August 1904, the government brought Cooperative Credit Societies Bill. Gokhale, speaking on the Bill, said at the outset that though he had various occasions to oppose the government, he would welcome this Bill. Gokhale said that Indian agriculturist was very poor and it was the duty of the government to make every effort to instil confidence in him and help him to stand on his feet. Speaking about the Bombay province, he said that there were three categories of the agriculturists. In the third category was the large mass of them who were so indebted that there was no hope for them to get out of it. Gokhale regretted that this category would not be helped by the provisions of the Bill. He cautioned the government that those who were not indebted would not be members of the Credit Society; only those in the second category who were not hopelessly indebted would join them. He suggested that if any measure was taken to remit the debt, only then the second category would be members of the Credit Society. Provision to confiscate the property was discouraging. The remedy he suggested was to affiliate the Societies to the banks as in Germany and Italy so that they would not be short of funds.

Gokhale’s great contribution to the Legislative Council was his budget speeches from 1902 to 1914. With his first speech he achieved the status of an
all India leader. Curzon was the viceroy between 1902 and 1905 when the budgets were surplus. For two years earlier also the budgets were surplus. Speaking on the budget of 1902, which was his first, Gokhale said that it was unprecedented to have seven years of continuous surpluses, but they constituted the double wrong to the community. That means the government had taken so much more from the people, when there was depression and suffering. It was wrong again because it led to misplaced optimism and so, secretary of state thought all was 'best in this best of the land’. The surplus was the result of continued high level of taxation which was introduced when the rupee was at its lowest. As that was not the case now, taxation level should have been scaled down. Nine years out of twelve were of increased taxation. In sixteen years the increased taxation brought an additional rupees one hundred three million to the treasury. If amount from the land revenue were added, it came to one hundred and fifteen million. In the circumstances, even if tax on salt was reduced by half a rupee and the duty on cloth was reduced and the minimum rate of the income tax was raised slightly, still the budget would be surplus. But the test lied in the economic condition of the country. It would be seen that the land under cultivation was reduced, high quality agricultural produce had gone down; while birth rate was low, death rate increased. Import-export trade was also less than before. Gokhale blamed the external policy of the government, which compelled it to increase the expenditure on the army. India was sufficiently armed to defend itself against
the supposed intended aggression by Russia. Expenditure on the army had gone up because of the expansionist policy of the government. Gokhale pressed for more provision for education and recasting of the policy of revision of the land revenue every thirty years.

Next year when the duty on salt and cloth was reduced, Gokhale welcomed the government measure. He, however, criticized the government for neglecting the interests of India to safeguard those of Lancashire. He again pleaded for more expenditure on education and suggested that if teachers and professors were to be brought from England to raise the quality, then it was advisable to bring in experienced and recognised scholars. Budgets for next two years were surplus and Gokhale repeated his demands. Quoting a good deal of statistics, Gokhale pointed out how municipalities and District Boards were in need of more grants. In 1905, Gokhale welcomed a raise of one rupee in the salary of an ordinary policeman. But dealing with the report of the police commission just released, he reviewed the police administration in general. He criticized them for being brutal and largely corrupt. He said they were generally partial to the vested interests and treated the ordinary people with great deal of brutality. When rivers in Assam and Bengal changed courses, dispute about the land ownership invariably arose and the police sided with the landlord and not the tenant or the small landholder. However, the government did not implement the report of the Police Commission, as it required more expenditure.
The first budget speech by Gokhale was hailed all over India including the official members of the Council. The Amrit Bazar Patrika’ wrote on March 29, 1902, “We had ever entertained the ambition of seeing some Indian member openly and fearlessly criticizing the Financial Statement of the Government. But this ambition was never satisfied. When members had ability, they had not the requisite courage. When they had requisite courage, they had not the ability. For the first time in the annals of the British rule in India, a native of India has not only succeeded in exposing the fallacies which underlie these Government Statements, but has ventured to do it in an uncompromising manner”. ‘The Times of India’ expressed gratification that in Gokhale Western India possessed a representative of so much distinction and individuality.\(^{14}\) R.C. Dutt wrote to Gokhale, “I am not in the habit of saying more than I mean—and I can honestly assure you that I consider your budget speech to be the ablest and the best that has ever been made by our point of view in the Viceroy’s Council. The Viceroy must feel today—strong and self-willed as he is—there are stronger forces arraigning themselves in India in the popular cause. And I dare prophesy knowing all the eminent men in India, you will be the strongest, the foremost and the most irresistible leader among them, because you are inspired by truest and honestest zeal for our country”.\(^{15}\) Finance Minister Sir Edward Law was much impressed by Gokhale’s speech and next year he invited him to be his guest at Simla so that he could discuss many subjects and get acquainted with the views of Gokhale.
‘The Statesman’ praised Gokhale for his eloquence and the mastery over English language as well his marshalling of facts. Sarala Ghoshal, who was the wife of a Congressman in Calcutta and a relative of Rabindranath Tagore, wrote to Gokhale on March 11, 1902, that she read his speech in the Council with great relish. She thought the reply by Lord Curzon was shallow. She also felt that India would benefit by the efforts made by people like him. She referred to Gokhale’s resolve to dedicate all his life in the service of the country and hoped Bengal would also have such men.

Gokhale, thus, became the centre of attention of the people in Calcutta and even the prestigious among them would take opportunity to attend the Council meetings as visitors when Gokhale was to speak. Gokhale, by nature and by the style of his speech, was bound to be effective in a small gathering like the Council. He would substantiate his argument by statistics and extracts from reports. His appeal was to the intellect and not to the emotion. That was why he was not able to sway the masses which orators like Surendranath Banerjea could. Srinivas Sastri gives a graphic description of Gokhale’s style and manner of public speech. He writes, “As he spoke you saw on his countenance a glow that people did not naturally catch on his face. For when he sat at a public meeting, he was generally glum and serious and when he began to speak, there was animation in his countenance, which communicated itself to the listeners. It would almost seem that his chief power lay in his
earnestness. Every word he spoke was charged with sincerity, you could see his soul as it were trying to escape through his lips”.

B.G. Horniman, narrating his experience, had written that Gokhale’s voice was very soft and it could not be audible in the press gallery of Viceroy’s Council. So when Horniman and some of his fellow journalists told this to Gokhale, he arranged to give them the gist of his speech in advance.

Lord Curzon could not be expected to be pleased with Gokhale’s speeches in the Council. But he realised his worth and then on December 31, 1903 in a letter to Gokhale he said, “I hope you will allow me to make an announcement in tomorrow’s Gazette of the CIE bestowed upon you. HM the King by a personal line from myself to say that the honour is offered to you in recognition of abilities which are freely bestowed upon the service of your countrymen and of which I would ask no more than that they should continue to be so employed. I wish India produces more of such men”.

Curzon, contrary to his public utterances, did not heed to the public opinion; and that was why he decided to hold a durbar in Delhi on December 31, 1902. In fact, only one or two years had passed after the horrible experience of famine that the large parts of the country went through. It was a totally uncalled for ceremony and it was also insulting to the feelings of the Indians who had lost so much in the natural calamity. But Curzon had a romantic streak and relished the medieval pomp and ceremony. Added to it
was his belief in the divine destiny of the British power and himself. It was no wonder that Curzon had come under severe criticism from the Indian press. ‘Kayastha Samachar’, in an editorial note, ridiculed the Maharaja of Reva for bringing a white elephant for the Delhi Durbar whose thousands of citizens had to take refuge in Delhi in the famine years. While ‘Review of Reviews’ reminded the participants of the durbar that, behind the glitter of the jewellery and diamonds of the Maharajas there were millions of invisible hungry and destitute Indians. Lokamanya Tilak was scathing in his criticism. He wrote in his editorial that instead of this unjustified ostentatious expenditure, if the government had remitted the debts of the cultivators, the expenses would have been much less and the people would have blessed the government. It should be remembered that the very ground on which this durbar took place, had seen so many empires and also their demise; and the seven cities which comprised the present Delhi were reduced to ashes. England had a history of about one thousand years, and so persons like Lytton or Curzon could not be expected to go beyond such period. But Indians who had a history of more than five thousand years, remember how Hastinapur and before that Ayodhya came to a sorry pass. So any number of such futile ceremonies would not be able to obliterate this historic memory of the people of India, warned Tilak.

In spite of much publicity that accompanied the Durbar, how were the guests, other than Maharajas and some very important persons treated? B.G.
Khaparde, who was one of the invitees, had very sad memories. He wrote indignantly in his diary that December 23rd was a bad day. His train reached Delhi by midnight, which was six, hours late. The English guests had conveyance and reached their destinations without having to wait. Other guests like Khaparde were not provided with such facility. They had to wait in the waiting room at the railway station. It was bitterly cold but the railway staff showed no courtesy. He reached his camp by ten in the morning. Roads were full of dust and at the camp there were no proper arrangements. They were far worse than at the annual sessions of the Congress. But an incident, which was narrated by Khaparde later to Blunt, was hilarious. He told him that when everybody present was waiting for Lord Curzon to arrive, a terrier from the Scottish band broke his leash and ran straight to the gilded chairs and climbed on to one of them. He was removed before Curzon and Duke of Connaught and the Duchess arrived. Some three soldiers from the Scottish Company fainted due to heat and later died. The Begum of Bhopal prostrated herself before the viceroy, which the assembled Maharajas resented. They were annoyed that the viceroy did not visit their camp even once.

Durbar was not an easy affair for Curzon or Secretary of State and his Advisory Council. Correspondence between the Viceroy and the Secretary of State was acrimonious and at one stage Curzon offered his resignation. After the death of Queen Victoria, Prince Edward was crowned in the summer of
1902 in London. Some Indian troops were sent for the occasion. Besides, some officials as well as invited guests had to attend the ceremony. Problem arose as to who was to pay for the travel and stay. There was to be a march of troops on the grounds of the India House and the guests from India were to be entertained. The Secretary of State’s Council took the stand that it was obligatory on the part of the Government of India to pay the expenses, which Lord Curzon resented. He told the Secretary of State that the Government of India was asked to pay for the troops which were sent to fight in the Boer War; now if India was to bear the cost for the participation in the coronation ceremony, it would not only be unbearable but also unjust. Prime Minister Arthur Balfour was a personal friend of Curzon. In a letter to Balfour, Curzon told him that when no other colony was asked to bear the expenses for the participation in the coronation ceremony, India should not be made an exception. This would not become an imperial power. In the Boer war some thousand Indian troops were sent; besides many prisoners were kept in India. But the then prime minister, Lord Salisbury, had not expressed a single word of appreciation or thanks. Now if India were asked to bear the expenses, people would resent it. Secretary of State, Lord George Hamilton asked Curzon to take back his letter. He warned, otherwise relations between the Secretary of States’ Council and the viceroy would be adversely affected. Curzon replied that there was honest difference of opinion and it should not be a cause for estrangement. The Council itself on many occasions took the
view, which was contrary to that of the Government of India. Lord Hamilton then realised that he had no convincing argument against that of Curzon; and the King himself held that Curzon’s position was sound. Lord Hamilton then had no other option than to take back his letter and agree to bring India on the same level as other colonies in regard to the sharing of expenses for the coronation.

Though Curzon came out successful in this controversy, on the other score he suffered a defeat. He had suggested to the Secretary of State that reduction in the tax should be announced at the time of the Durbar. He said this was customary in India, and as India had suffered much for the cause of the Empire, this reduction would be appropriate and would be appreciated by Indians. Lord Hamilton rejected this suggestion, which, according to him, would lay a precedent, which the British government did not approve of. He said, that Curzon could announce such reduction at the time of budget session of his Council. Curzon was furious and threatened resignation. But in the end he had to retreat. Lord Curzon by then thought that unless he continued to be the viceroy, many of the schemes, which he had undertaken, would not be successfully completed. He, therefore, in 1903 wrote to the prime minister, Balfour, that his term should be extended for another five years. As Curzon had rubbed some ministers and officials the wrong way, most of them were against acceding to his request. Correspondence between Balfour and Curzon
on this subject was not very pleasant. However, the ministry agreed to grant an extension to Lord Curzon.

In 1904, on the suggestion of the British Committee, the Congress had resolved to send a delegation of four to England to put before the English people and their representatives the case of India. One of the delegates was to be Gokhale. It was Wedderburn who wanted Gokhale to visit England because the Tories were losing ground and elections were a possibility. He thought, if Gokhale and some Congress leaders visited England and addressed meetings, it would have a salutary effect. Gokhale then started making preparations. But when he with his friend Lallubhai Samaldas met Pherozeshah Mehta, he disapproved of the visit of an Indian delegation to England. It was obvious that Pherozeshah was not against Gokhale’s visit, but was against the British Committee, as he thought the Committee was irrelevant and Dadabhai was wasting his time in England. Besides, Pherozeshah was directly and indirectly criticised in the Congress session, which had resolved to send the delegation. Though Gokhale had not recorded how he was treated by Mehta, Sir Lallubhai in a letter to Gokhale on May 10 had done so. He wrote, “We were both so much excited last night that I did not like to add fuel to the fire by speaking out mind about the disgraceful (I use the word in calm state of my mind) conduct of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta. You should not give up the idea of going as a delegate to England. The public
has elected you, and you should not disappoint the public. I feel that an apology or at least an explanation is due to you from him. You may treat him formally as a recognised leader of the party; the private relations will of course cease”. Gokhale, however, did not defy Pherozeshah because of his reverence for him. But in the end, Pherozeshah relented under the pressure from Dadabhai, Hume and Wedderburn and Gokhale sailed to England in September 1905.

The year 1905 was important in the life of Gokhale and also in the history of India, as on June 12 of that year Gokhale established an institution, which played a historical role in the years to come. As he was playing his role as a member of the Central Legislative Council, Gokhale felt the need of an organisation of young men who would dedicate their lives in the self-less service of the country and study various problems facing her. He held long discussions with his friends like, Dr. Dev and then decided to start an institution to be named ‘The Servants of India Society.’ On early morning of June 12, 1905 Gokhale along with three of his colleagues went to a ridge near Fergusson College. First Gokhale took seven vows and administered them to N.A. Dravid, A.V. Patwardhan and G.K. Deodhar. Gokhale was designated as the First Member. The object of the society as mentioned in the memorandum was to train men for the work of political education and agitation, and to promote by all constitutional means the national interests of the Indian
people. This was changed and the objective was then defined as “to train national missionaries for the service of India and to promote by all constitutional means the true interests of the Indian people”. The seven vows which all the members had to take were:

1. That the Country will always be the first in his thoughts and he will give to her service the best that is in him.
2. That in serving the country he will seek no personal advantage to himself.
3. That he will regard all Indians as brothers and will work for the advancement of all, without distinction of caste and creed.
4. That he will be content with such provision for himself and his family, if he has any, as the Society may be able to make. He will devote no part of his energies to earn money for himself.
5. That he will lead a pure personal life.
6. That he will engage in no personal quarrel with anyone.
7. That he will always keep in view the aims of the Society and watch over its interests with utmost zeal, doing all he can to advance its work. He will never do anything which is inconsistent with the objects of the Society.

In order to train the members, a library was established and Gokhale himself took pains to select books on subjects like politics, history, economics
as well as parliamentary reports and reports on various subjects. The constitution was drafted by Gokhale. After consultations with many of his friends, he made amends. One of those friends was Professor Selby for whom Gokhale had high regards. After reading the draft, Selby objected to the article five of the constitution. That article said, “Every member on admission is under a vow of absolute obedience to the First Member for five years”. Professor Selby wrote on June 15, 1905, “I have read through the rules of your new Society. It is rather an awful thing that you should ask a man to surrender absolutely to you, his conscience and the right of private judgment for five years. This popularly was supposed to be the first condition of admission to ‘the Society of Jesus’ and the main ground for Protestant condemnation of that order. It reads to an Englishman rather like a rule of a Russian secret society”. Gokhale pondered over this letter and modified the article five. It then read, “Every member under training shall, during the time that he is under training, place himself under entire guidance and control of the First Member and do such studies as the First Member may direct”. Gokhale had anticipated that the absolute powers to the First Member would invite objection, and so in a circular letter along with the pamphlet about the proposed Society, Gokhale had said, “It may perhaps appear to you on a perusal of the rules that the position of the First Member during the first five years is much too dominant. But after very careful consideration we have come to the conclusion that it is necessary to make it so. The work of the
Society will often involve questions at the utmost delicacy and requiring the greatest introspection. Men with unformed judgments in political matters and unaccustomed to the responsibilities of public life cannot be permitted to determine important issues without exposing the Society to grave risks. The five years special discipline which we propose for every member of the Society is intended to mould alike his character and judgment and enable him to comprehend an ideal for the nation, complete in all respects”. But when Gokhale received Selby’s letter, he saw the point and amended the Article five.

Krishna swami Iyer advised Gokhale to consult the governor. He wrote, “Can you not take the Governor and any of his Councillors into your confidence? They are sure to disapprove of your scheme, but they will know what it is and won’t suspect. Secrecy endangers suspicion, and suspicion of the authorities in India means danger to individuals. The Servants of India Society must face it. But unnecessary risk must be avoided. I am not for unnecessary publicity. But few at the head of the government may know. No serious harm can then befall anybody”. Gokhale received very good response from many of his friends in India and abroad and he did not find it difficult to collect money. Sir Lallubhai Samaldas, sending a cheque, suggested that those who subscribed largely should have some voice in the management. Sir Ratan Tata sent the first instalment of Rs. 5000 and wrote to Gokhale, “I give
my personal support to the Society, because I see in it a constitutional and rational alternative to the violent methods which some people adopt for the progress of our people and country. In the statement of your little pamphlet of the objects of the Society, I notice one omission. There appears to be no reference to stimulate industrial development of the country”. Srinivas Sastri was sworn as a member of the Society at Calcutta in 1906, when Gokhale took Sastri and two or three others to meet Dadabhai, who that year presided over the Congress session. In 1935 when a memorial tablet was erected at the place where Gokhale and three other members took the vows, Sastri in his speech narrated the conversation, which Gokhale had with Dadabhai. Gokhale told the Grand Old Man that some of those who sat beside him were the members of the Servants of India Society. Dadabhai threw his hands in surprise. He said, “That’s right. This is the idea which I have long held in my mind and I congratulate Mr. Gokhale on having had the good fortune to embody it in an actual organisation”. The construction of the building of the Society started in the 1905 itself, as it had by then received donations of about rupees seventy thousand.

Before his departure to England, C.Y. Chintamani informed Gokhale that Benares and Allahabad Congress Committees had decided upon his nomination for the president ship of the Congress session to be held in Benares later in the year. In England Gokhale had a whirlwind tour of the
country. Besides London he addressed several meetings in different cities and
towns and gave interviews. Gokhale met Morley, Brodrick and several other
politicians. After meeting Gokhale, Morley thought he was close to Cavour,
an Italian leader. The burden of Gokhale’s speeches and interviews was that
India’s objective was to reach Dominion Status; to reach that goal, provincial
as well as the Central Legislative Council should be made more
representative of the people and the elective principle should be adopted. He
did not ask for the reduction of the majority of the official members in the
Councils. He made it clear that he or Congress was not asking for the far-
reaching changes in the immediate future. He impressed upon his audience
that a new generation of the English educated people had come up and it was
growing. This generation, naturally, demanded English institutions and equal
treatment, which were guaranteed by Queen Victoria’s Proclamation in 1858.
Viceroy like Lord Ripon adopted a liberal policy and tried to bridge the gap
between the Englishmen and Indians. But these efforts were thwarted by his
own countrymen, giving rise to the suspicion and resentment among the
educated Indians. Lord Curzon had adopted the policy of repression, which
was bound to fail. Indians had, therefore, lost faith in the British rule.

Wedderburn, reviewing Gokhale’s tour, wrote, “In 1905, four Delegates
from India were expected. Only two Delegates, Mr. Gokhale and Mr. Lala
Lajpat Rai were able to come; and much of Mr. Lajpat Rai’s time was taken
up by a visit to America, where he addressed meetings at New York, Boston and Chicago. But Mr. Gokhale’s campaign in Yorkshire and Lancashire was a brilliant success. His visit to Lancashire was specially opportune, with reference to the Partition of Bengal and boycott of Manchester goods. At Manchester he addressed four important meetings. At each of these meetings he made a different speech. The Chairman of the British Committee, who accompanied him can bear witness to the profound impression produced on his hearers by the accuracy of his information and the cogency of his arguments. Good meetings were also held in London, and he had a gratifying reception by the undergraduates of the ‘Union’ at Cambridge, where his motion in favour of more popular institutions for India was carried by 161 to 62. The Fabian Society also held a special meeting to hear an address from him”.18

In one of his speeches Gokhale had posed the question whether India, had progressed morally and materially under the British rule. He said under the British peace and stability were established and the English education had spread. But it was evident that the English occupied all high government posts. As the Indians were not appointed on any responsible position, their Growth had been started and there was frustration. Among the 2400 government officers who received a salary of 700 pounds, only 60 were Indians. A voter in England enjoys a right, which three hundred million
Indians did not. When Natal and Transvaal were under the Boers; some of the ordinances which the government had promulgated were against the Indian settlers but were never actually implemented. But after the British defeated the Boers and those colonies came under their rule, the same repressive laws came into force. That was why an Indian in those colonies could not walk on the footpath on which an Englishman was crossing and he could not get reservation in the hotel or dine in a restaurant along with an Englishman. Gokhale then compared the relative income of the British and the Indians. He pointed out that whereas average per capita income of England was forty-two pounds that of India was two pounds. The per capita import of England was thirteen pounds and that of India was five shillings. According to William Hunter, forty per cent of Indians went hungry, as they were unable to afford two meals a day. During the previous eight years, produce worth two hundred million pounds was lost due to famine. In the last twenty years the death rate per thousand had gone up and not down. One third of the revenue was spent on the salary, pension and allowances of the English officials. Even then, Gokhale said, that India’s demands were moderate. They were: fifty per cent of the non-official members on the Councils; more Indians to be appointed in the higher government posts; right to move an amendment to the annual budget etc.

On November 15, 1905 Gokhale addressed the New Reform Club. He
alluded to Morley’s book on Gladstone where one expression of Gladstone’s repeatedly occurs. Gladstone used to say that though Oxford had taught him many things, it had not taught him an appreciation of the profound principle of liberty as a factor of human progress. Gokhale then said, “Well, it seems other Oxford men, too, have not learnt how to appreciate that principle. Lord Curzon is no believer in free institution or in national aspiration. I believe if he were allowed a free hand, he would hand the people of this country back to the rule of the aristocracy that governed here before 1832. Well, Lord Curzon sees that the educated classes of India are pressing forward more and more to be associated with the government of their own country, and he thinks it is not to the interest of England, as he understands that interest, that this should be so. He has tried to fetter the Press by his Official Secret Act. In regard to higher education, he has transferred the control to the hands of the officials and of such Indians as will always agree with the officials. Then as regards the few fairly high offices open to us in our own country, he has abolished competition and made everything dependent upon the pleasure of the official patronage. Now the main part of the responsibility for this state of things must rest on Lord Curzon, after all it is your system of administration in India that has enabled him to attempt all this repression. My quarrel, therefore, is less with him personally, or with the officials, than with the system—this bureaucratic system—this monopoly of power by officials”. Gokhale’s speeches and interviews had good press coverage, and newspapers like ‘The
Daily Star’ and ‘The Daily Chronicle’ praised him. Dadabhai was pleased with his performance. But Pherozeshah was not reconciled, and so Gokhale, on his arrival in Bombay, was not accorded a welcome. It was expected of the Bombay Presidency Association and the Congress Committee to arrange a meeting to honour Gokhale. But it was Lokmanya Tilak, who arranged a reception in Bombay. When Gokhale arrived in Poona, Tilak invited him to his residence, which was also the office of ‘Kesari’ and ‘Maratha’. Tilak praised Gokhale for his speeches and efforts in England. He said, “Gokhale was the suitable person to put the case of India before the English public by his sweet tongue and effective arguments. His task was difficult, because there were powerful advocates of the officials in India; but Gokhale was not deterred and came out successfully”.

Before the Benares session of the Congress, Dadabhai congratulated Gokhale on his nomination as president of the Congress and reviewed the political situation as he saw it. Dadabhai said that when fifty-two years ago three associations were started in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, they had limited political ideas and aspirations. They also had no knowledge of the extent and causes of poverty in India. The formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was the fruit of the efforts of these three organisations. Dadabhai then stressed the importance of awakening the Indian people of their rights and also to educate the English public of their duty to grant such
rights. This double work both in India and England was absolutely necessary, reminded Dadabhai. He again expressed his faith in achieving equal rights for India as those of other colonies, and make India prosperous. Dadabhai gave credit to the Congress for awakening in India, which was manifest in protest against oppressive measures of Lord Hamilton and Lord Curzon. At the same time Dadabhai expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the help, which Hume, Wedderburn, Sir Henry Cotton and Martin Wood had given to the Congress. He desired that in each province there should be a band of young people who would work to educate the people about their rights as free British citizens and they should do this work in a missionary spirit. He wanted more Indian members to be elected to the British Parliament and also stressed the importance of unity among the people. Dadabhai was, however, disturbed by the differences in the Congress and the rise of radicalism among the youths. He wrote to Gokhale, “We have now around us a new generation of well educated and prepared (persons), thanks to past work, for the great task before them. Theirs is now the responsibility. Let the youth of the rising generation rally round the Congress with that energy and enthusiasm which youth can most furnish. Let them discuss them and then abide by, and undertake the burden of carrying into effect, the decisions of the majority. Let those who cannot agree take their own course in their own way towards the same goal, and not hamper and destroy each other’s work”.  

Dadabhai had referred to the rise of the youths who were inclined to follow a radical path. This new trend was due to the partition of Bengal and also due to the new wave of self-assertion generated by Japan’s victory over Russia. That an Asian nation could defeat a European nation had enthused the people of Asia. Gokhale had welcomed this victory of Japan. William Digby, in a speech in London, appealed the British to take cognisance of this new awakening in Asia and India. The enthusiasm of the Indian leaders was understandable, but one does not know whether they were fully aware of the happenings and also the way the Government of Japan was ruling the country. The victory was costly to Japan. It had lost one hundred ten thousand soldiers. United States of America had brought about the cease-fire; and under the terms of the peace, Japan had to surrender her right over the Sakhalin Island and seven thousand mile railway in Manchuria. England, Germany and Russia moved to contain Japan so that it would not occupy China. Besides, the Meigy rule in Japan was no better than that of the Tsar in Russia and was equally oppressive. Army was systematically given prominence and civil liberties had no place in the scheme of things. Press was suppressed. Japan also aspired to bring Asia under its sphere of influence.

Japan’s victory had given cause to some British newspapers and periodicals to press for re-examination of England’s policy towards Russia, India and Afghanistan. England by then had a treaty with Japan, which had
accepted England’s right to defend India. Mr. Leonard Courtney in a letter to ‘The Times’ had described the treaty as humiliating. ‘The Westminster Review’ of November 1905 disapproving of this criticism said, the questions asked by Courtney were the same which this so Imperial Government was driving all the thinking people all over the world and also in India to ask themselves. The effect in India itself cannot but be most damaging to our prestige. Upon that prestige and upon the loyal attachment of the native population our rule in India depends. If once the native races are alienated from us, our rule is at an end. We cannot hold India by force of arms alone. Yet that seems to be the aim of Tory Imperialism. For that they would subject this country to the manifold evils of conscription, and call in ‘the yellow man’ to aid John Bull in bearing the ‘the White man’s burden’. Happily the present Tory Government is ‘under sentence of death’. Its chequered career may soon close; and then we should see once more as Viceroy a sane Imperialist, a Liberal of the type of Lord Ripon, who won such affection and such honour in that role. We should see the ‘forward’ party brought to heel, the extravagant military expenditure ruthlessly cut down, the crushing burdens on the ryots materially lightened, and the native races trained in that self-government for which, as in the case of Bengal, they have proved themselves so well—in the eyes of a Tory Government too well-fitted. Thus and thus alone, may the evil wrought by Tory Imperialism be undone”.
Four months before the Benares Congress, Lord Curzon had resigned and Lord Minto had taken over. At Benares, when Gokhale as the president-elect of the Congress was taken in a procession, Lala Lajpat Rai accompanied him. Lajpat Rai who distinct memory of that event had said that Gokhale was overwhelmed by the grand reception and tears of joy and gratefulness were in his eyes. It was inevitable that Gokhale should have reviewed Lord Curzon’s regime in his address. Gokhale, of course, praised the qualities of the former viceroy, but he also described how Curzon’s regime alienated the people of India from the administration. He compared Curzon with Aurangzeb. “There we find the same attempt at a rule excessively centralized and intensely personal, the same strenuous purpose, the same overpowering consciousness of duty, the same persistence in a policy of distrust and repression, resulting in bitter exasperation all round”. Gokhale said that Lord Curzon did not understand India, he thought India was a country where Englishmen were to monopolise all power. Curzon, in his farewell speech as the Viceroy, enumerated his achievements. He tried to show the reduction of salt duty, more grants for education and irrigation etc., all these, he did in spite of the opposition of the educated classes. But Gokhale pointed out that it was Congress, which was demanding all these for a long time.

Gokhale then referred to the partition of Bengal and severely criticised Lord Curzon and his administration. He said, Curzon and his advisors had all
the means to know the intense feeling of resentment of the people, but they deliberately ignored them. When it was known that some sort of a scheme of partition of Bengal was under the active consideration of the government, about 500 meetings were held in the province. But the government did not relent. The most natural course according to Gokhale was to take away Bihar, Orissa and Chota Nagpur from Bengal and form a separate province. Gokhale then dealt with the partition scheme and showed how harmful it was. He was ready to give the new viceroy, Lord Minto, some time to reconsider the scheme and make proper amends. Gokhale described the mass agitation in Bengal as a great landmark in the history of the Congress. He welcomed the great tidal wave of true national consciousness. The boycott movement against the British goods, in Bengal, was the expression of frustration because of the apathy of the government. Gokhale said that the movement was a political weapon and the people of Bengal were justified in taking that step. But Gokhale advised that the weapon like that had to be reserved for extreme occasions. He, then, discussed the practical aspect of the boycott movement. His contention was that it was impractical and suicidal to spread the movement all over the country. He gave the details of overall capacity of our spinning mills and showed how they would not be able to satisfy the demand for cloth in the country. He, therefore, advised that the movement should be confined to Bengal where the grievance was genuine and the attitude of the government reprehensible. This latter part of Gokhale’s speech, though
practical, was out of tune with the sentiments of the majority of delegates.

In England, on leave before returning to India, Curzon felt that urgent attention must be given to the Afghanistan problem. In his stay in England Curzon had discussions with the prime minister and the Secretary of State. The consensus was that this problem had to be solved without giving the impression to the Amir that England had retreated and cowed down. In England it was urged by some that the time was opportune to strike at Russia when she was engaged in fighting with Japan. But nobody trusted Amir who had demanded a large amount as aid. Curzon thought it was dangerous to give such aid, as Amir might use it against the British. The C-in-C, Lord Kitchener, suggested that Britain should take the responsibility of defending Afghanistan, to which Curzon had strong objections. He feared in case Afghans did not fight, England’s prestige would suffer. So a representative of the Government of India was sent to Kabul to negotiate with the Amir, who was not playing ball and Curzon was also taking a stiff stand.

The British government, initially supported Curzon, but the Secretary of State, Brodrick realised that it would lead to a blind Galley. Brodrick, in a letter to the Governor of Bombay, expressed doubts about the policy pursued by Curzon, which might create a stalemate, and Amir would be completely alienated. Curzon wanted the draft of the treaty, which the Amir had proposed, rejected; but the British government after careful thought decided
to accept it in spite of the strong protest by Curzon. Earl of Middleton, who was the war Minister in the Balfour cabinet said, “For some time previously Curzon’s private letters, including the official letter written every week to the Secretary of State, had shown symptoms of increasing unrest, and were full of threats as to the course he might feel it necessary to take. The two Governments were, in fact, running on lines which could only end in a collision, the Cabinet regarding with increasing apprehension the high-handed policy of the Viceroy, and Curzon claiming for the opinion of the Indian Government a predominance, which as Balfour remarked at the time, would rise India to the position of an independent and not always friendly power.”

Balfour, as a personal friend of Curzon, tried always to assuage the ruffled feelings of Curzon and in one of the letters advised him that no minister including the prime minister could get everything done according to his wishes. If some suggestions were not accepted by the Cabinet or the Secretary of State, Balfour asked Curzon not to take that as a personal slight.

The second point of differences between the viceroy and the Cabinet was how to deal with Tibet. Curzon could not tolerate the intrusion by Tibet in the Indian territory which the Tibetan government was often making. He also apprehended that Russia might bring Tibet under its wings. For three years Curzon wrote several letters to the Dalai Lama, which the Tibetan ruler sent back to Curzon without opening them. Blanche Dugdale, a niece of
Arthur Balfour, writing about the differences between Curzon and the Cabinet on the question of Tibet, says, “Between the time of taking the decision in June 1903, and Lord Curzon’s visit to England in the summer of 1904, he had to a certain extent forced his own policy upon the Cabinet with regard to Tibet. In this case as in that of Afghanistan, Lord Curzon worked for closer contact, penetration, establishment of permanent influence, at almost any cost, as the only means, in his view, of countering the intrigues of Russia. A British Mission, under Colonel Young husband, advanced upon Lhasa, where it did not penetrate without the use of force. It ended by demanding conditions from the Tibetans, which would have committed Great Britain to keeping a control over the country for seventy-five years. These terms, imposed by Colonel Young husband, were promptly repudiated by the Cabinet, to the intense mortification of Lord Curzon, who was in London at that time”.

Lord Curzon also resented the demand by the Secretary of State, Brodrick, to send twenty thousand coolies to Transvaal for railway work. Curzon wrote, “The name of South Africa stinks in the nostrils of India. The most bitter feelings exist over the treatment meted out to Indians in the Transvaal and Natal. Any attempt to ignore or override this feeling would produce a commotion greater even than that over the South African garrison, while the recollection of the latter would tend to inflame it. We are not in the
least anxious to send Indian coolies to work upon the railways in the Transvaal or anywhere else. Already tens of thousands of Indians live in South Africa, subject to invidious and sometimes odious disabilities. Surely you do not mean to order Government of India to send coolies to the Transvaal whether they like it or not? I cannot without a good deal of thought and study swallow the proposition that, having saved South Africa at the outbreak of the war, it is now the duty of India to develop it”. Dilating upon the importance of Indian opinion, Curzon pointedly repeated that there were some things, which the Home Governments, could no longer do at India’s expense. For five years he had been preaching the doctrine of Empire, but Indians were disposed to treat it as a farce.22

Curzon and the Cabinet had another serious difference of opinion. At the insistence of Lord Curzon, Lord Kitchener was appointed as the C-in-C of India. War minister Middleton argued with Curzon how Kitchener was required in England, but Curzon refused to budge. Middleton correctly anticipated that the two being intensely self-centred, would not be able to work together. Within three months of his arrival in India, Kitchener came to the conclusion that the administration of the army in India was inefficient. He also believed that there was dual control of the army, as besides C-in-C, there was a Member for Defence in the Viceroy’s Advisory Council. This arrangement to him was not conducive to the efficiency of the army. So he
suggested the abolition of the post of the Member for Defence in the Viceroy’s Advisory Council and appoint the C-in-C to the Council. Curzon thought that if Kitchener’s demand were accepted, the C-in-C would have much more powers, which politically would not augur well. Both Curzon and the Advisory Council of the Secretary of State agreed that the dual control of the army was not advisable; but Curzon was opposed to give C-in-C a seat on the Viceroy’s Advisory Council. Prime Minister Balfour did his best to persuade Curzon, but it was of no avail. So Curzon resigned. His resignation was hailed in India; but in England, the opinion was divided.

‘The Times’ wrote on August 21, 1905. “While we think that Lord Curzon made a mistake in withdrawing his first resignation and another mistake in choosing the occasion of his second resignation, we are satisfied that other persons involved in the discussion have been seriously at fault. The tone of Mr. Broderick’s dispatches has not been calculated to bring about an amicable settlement of the issues in dispute. He was justified, no doubt, in vindicating the rights of his office, but this object might have been effectively achieved without asserting them with a crudity which could hardly fail to give offence, even to a man less sensitive than Lord Curzon on questions of personal and official dignity. Lord Curzon has proved himself to be the greatest Viceroy of our times, as Lord Kitchener is the greatest of our younger soldiers. They are both men whom the Empire can ill spare”. ‘The
Westminster Review’, in the October 1905 issue said, “The danger to our rule in India comes not from without, but from within, and chiefly from the heavy military expenditure; a drain likely to be heavier still, now that Lord Kitchener has, at the cost of Lord Curzon’s resignation, won for himself a free hand. In the whole of Lord Curzon’s rule, nothing became him so well as the leaving of it; for by the gross extravagance of the Delhi Durbar, held at a time when plague and famine were ravaging the country; by the ‘peaceful’ mission to Tibet, by his breaking down of local self-government and of the education system; and by such insensate schemes as that of the partition of Bengal, Lord Curzon has done much to alienate our fellow-subjects in India. He stood staunch, however, for Free Trade and for supremacy of the civil over military power; and this must be accounted unto him for righteousness”.

Lord Curzon, speaking in the House of Lords, asserted that behind his resignation there was some principle involved. Two years after, in a speech in Birmingham, he spoke on ‘True Imperialism’. Curzon had romantic notions about the British Empire and his speech was in keeping with it. He defended Clive and Hastings and said, if their career was taken into account, it could not be said that there were some intrinsic defects or shortcomings in the Empire. Curzon compared the British Empire to Saturn.

He said as with the Saturn there were many rings around the British Empire also. Curzon said that even if Canada and some other colonies
became independent, England would not be adversely affected. But if India became free, what would happen? Curzon had no doubt that immediately after achieving independence, India would fall a prey to some conqueror. If this did not happen, then it would be a victim of the competition among some powers and would fall apart. With the loss of colonies and India, England’s trade would be affected and army would have to be reduced. Coal mines and docks might come to a standstill and England would be slightly better than Belgium. Empire had brought glory to England, but it brought a key to duty and service to the mankind. England’s strength was not dependent on the military might, but on the moral authority. But in no case the civil authority should be subordinated; otherwise military authority would become superior. Curzon reminded his audience that it was difficult to rule India, as Indians were racially different and its customs and religion were different from those of Englishmen. There, the society was steeped in old tradition and customs. Nationalism was taking roots, but it would be a mistake to give autonomy to India which would ruin the country and that would be a betrayal of the trust. Curzon’s speech naturally came under criticism in India and also in England.

Bengal was partitioned under the rule of Curzon, which infuriated the people and created problems for the British Government; but Congress also entered into a difficult period. Pherozeshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjea and some others were facing opposition within the organization. The new
subject of controversy was about the nature and direction of the Congress work. Gokhale could not attend the Madras session of the Congress in 1903. Most of the delegates were bored by the presidential address and also many other speeches. Gokhale’s friend and novelist from Maharashtra, H.N. Apte, who attended it, conveyed his impressions to Gokhale. He wrote, “the younger was not satisfied with the working of the Congress and there was the hankering for something new—although nobody could say what it was that was wanted”.

Sir Ramesh Chandra Dutt was one of those earnest enough to set the house of the Congress in order. On February 1903, he wrote to Gokhale, “You have pointed out to me a new path of usefulness and fired in me a new ambition. And the last years of my life shall not be lived in vain if I succeed in organizing our work in India and leading all the patriotic aspirations. Let us suppose the next Congress creates an Executive Committee consisting of Mehta, Charlu and myself for organizing and conducting Congress work in India. I was even thinking adding the names of Malviya of Northern India and Mudholkar of C.P. and Berar to make a Committee of five members; a central place of a permanent office (Bombay, Amraoti and Allahabad). I will in the course of three winter months visit all the provinces, create 50 affiliated Congress Associations, frame rules for them, explain their work to them—and inspire in them a new life. More than this we will train these Associations to
work along the same channel. We will focus all the forces of the *country* in the same centre, and we will work and speak on every question with a united voice of a nation. We will create a moral power which the administration will soon enlist in the cause of good government”.23

Dutt in another letter to Gokhale on November 12, 1903, suggested that Pherozeshah and Dutt himself should work jointly as Executive Committee, which would work throughout the year. He was confident that Mehta and he himself would work closely and the decisions would be joint ones. He suggested that Gokhale should be the paid Secretary. Though Dutt had written all this with good intentions and with a view to galvanize the Congress into a live force, it was far from reality. First, his belief that he would be able to work with Pherozeshah and take joint decisions was a daydream. Pherozeshah would not have allowed Dutt to be his associate on equal footing. Second, Wacha, without naming Pherozeshah, had already complained to Dadabhai that leaders like Mehta were not giving enough time for Congress. Dutt also wanted to create a moral force. But the new generation of Congressmen and especially the atmosphere created by the partition of Bengal had challenged the moral authority of the old leaders like Mehta.

Congress leaders had to face the test of this changed mood of the congressmen at the Benares session. When a resolution welcoming the Prince of Wales, later George the fifth, came before the session, Lala Lajpat Rai
moved that it was unnecessary and unwarranted. He was supported by Tilak. Lajpat Rai said that the country had recently gone through the ravages of famine, and because of the partition of Bengal and general repressive policy of Lord Curzon, there was dissatisfaction all round. Sensing this the bureaucracy had planned this visit of the Prince. Old leaders of the Congress naturally disliked this amendment by Lajpat Rai, while many Congressmen from Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra supported it. Lajpat Rai writes, “At last the resolution (welcoming the Prince) was carried by a majority, but we announced immediately that we would oppose it again in the general meeting of the National Congress. This enraged the old leaders, and the UP leaders were frightened. Information was sent the same night to the Commissioner, the Officer Commanding and the Police Superintendent of Benares. Next morning Munshi Madho Lai of Benares brought the Deputy Commissioner to the pandal. They had begun to fear that there might be some rioting, and were making preparations accordingly. We were dubbed as sedition-monger and ‘bad mashes’. The whole of that night and the next morning this situation remained the topic of discussion. Threats were held out to us in the morning. Some said we were bringing the province into disgrace, others feared that the Congress would be dead. So on and so forth. But our resolve remained unaffected. At last Gokhale arrived, but instead of going to the Congress pandal, he began to persuade me. When he found me inexorable, he made a personal appeal to me and asked me to waive opposition for his sake. To this I
agreed and gave him a promise that we would abstain from attending the sitting whilst this resolution was being dealt with, so that we might not have to oppose it; the understanding was that in the record it would not be said that the resolution was accepted unanimously. I got Tilak to agree to this understanding.”

Later, Srinivas Sastri in his lectures on Pherozeshah Mehta narrated how Gokhale tried his level best to persuade Pherozeshah to attend the Benares session of the Congress, but Mehta, did not relent. Sastri also said that the speech delivered by Lajpat Rai in the Subjects Committee of the Congress was “impetuous and the strongest.” Both Gokhale and V. Krishnaswami Iyer took fright. C.V. Munnuswami was a Congress reporter at the time. Krishnaswami Iyer told him to omit all those passages from Lajpat Rais speech. Gokhale also repeated this appeal. They might have thought that by this they would succeed in shutting out the speech from the government. But as Sastri said, there were many CID men and informants present in the session.

Thus when Dutt was thinking of regeneration of the Congress organization, seeds of discord were sown not only in the Benares Congress, but even before. Benares Congress signalled that the storm would break out any day. That day came after two years and the Congress was split.

References


15. Gokhale Papers.


17. Gokhale Papers.


19. Dadabhai Papers.


22. David Dilks, Curzon in india, Vol. 2. Taplinger publishing Co., NY.,
1969, pp. 129-130.

23. B.R. NANDA, Gokhale, the Indian Moderates and the British Raj,
OUP, Delhi, 1977, pp 164-165

24. Vijay Chandra Joshi (E.D), Lala Lajpat Rai, Autobiographical writings,
Uni, Publishers, New Delhi, 1965, pp 110-111